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NATION

FDA to implement plan barring gay men from donating sperm

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK • To the dismay of gay-rights activists, the Food and Drug Administration is about to implement guidelines recommending that any man who has engaged in homosexual sex in the previous five years be barred from serving as an anonymous sperm donor.

The FDA has rejected calls to scrap the provision, insisting that gay men collectively pose a higher-than-average risk of carrying the AIDS virus. Critics accuse the FDA of stigmatizing all gay men rather than adopting a screening process that focuses on high-risk sexual behavior by any would-be donor.

"Under these rules, a heterosexual man who had unprotected sex with HIV-positive prostitutes would be OK as a donor one year later, but a gay man in a monogamous, safe-sex relationship is not OK unless he's been celibate for five years," said Leland Traiman, director of a clinic in Alameda, Calif., that seeks gay sperm donors.

Traiman said adequate safety assurances can be provided by testing a sperm donor at the time of the initial donation, then freezing the sperm for a six-month quarantine and testing the donor again to be sure there is no new sign of HIV or other diseases.

Although there is disagreement over whether the FDA guideline regarding gay men will have the force of law, most doctors and clinics are expected to observe it.

The practical effect of the provision — part of a broader set of cell and tissue donation regulations that take effect May 25 — is hard to gauge.

It is likely to affect some lesbian couples who want a child and prefer to use a gay man's sperm for artificial insemination.

But it is the provision's symbolic aspect that particularly troubles gay-rights groups.

Kevin Cathcart, executive director of Lambda Legal gay rights group, has called it "policy based on bigotry."

"The part I find most offensive — and a little frightening — is that it isn't based on good science," Cathcart said. "There's a steadily increasing trend of heterosexual transmission of HIV, and yet the FDA still has this notion that you protect people by putting gay men out of the pool."

In a letter to the FDA, Lambda Legal has suggested a screening procedure based on sexual behavior, not sexual orientation.

Prospective donors — gay or straight — would be rejected if they had engaged in unprotected sex in the previous 12 months with an HIV-positive person, an illegal drug user, or "an individual of unknown HIV status outside of a monogamous relationship."

But an FDA spokeswoman cited FDA documents suggesting that officials felt the broader exclusion was prudent even if it affected gay men who practice safe sex.

"The FDA is very much aware that strict exclusion policies eliminate some safe donors," said one document.

ear Air Force contract in April

ce for Princeton last ading the Falcons to A Tournament appear-

hich has been to the ent seven times since e Atlantic 10 Confer- er to Mooney's home- phia.

w Air Force salary en about $242,000. about $400,000 per ond, according to the es-Dispatch, though ney was not a factor. eat basketball tradition," Mooney said. "They have a genuine commitment to basketball and want to see their program do well. Geography is definitely a factor; it's pretty close to my home. The Atlantic 10 is a great conference and one I'm familiar with."

Air Force athletic director Hans Mueh could not be reached for comment.

Saks said Mooney was released from the recently signed contract without having to compensate the academy. Saks also said Air Force would conduct a national search for its next coach.

Associate head coach Mike McKee and assistant coach Larry Mangino both said they are interested in the position.

"It was difficult to lose Joe a year ago and then when Chris really unexpectedly accepted this job, it's a blow to you," Saks said. "We need to all take a step back and appreciate what Chris has done for this program for not just one year but for five years. It's rare people stay in one place for a long period of time anymore."

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is causing confusion at the state Capitol, particularly among lawmakers who would like to be appointed to fill the vacancy.

"Clearly, if it was for the duration of the term, I'd be interested," said Sen. Mark Hillman, R-Burlington, consid-